DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE DOCTRINE OF JOINT ACTIONS OF THE ISRAELI DEFENCE FORCES

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This paper has as its main focus the way in which the Israeli Joint warfighting doctrine has evolved in time, since the creation of the Jewish state, as well as the particularities and methods of improving the next stage of this type of doctrine, as outlined in the Momentum Plan released by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). The aim of the research is to assess whether the joint warfighting actions have given the IDF an edge in accomplishing the strategic objectives designed by the Israeli political leadership, as well as whether the next planned iteration of the Israeli joint warfighting doctrine, the Momentum Plan, is feasible and whether it has any vulnerabilities to address. The main methodological methods used in this paper are the case study of the conflicts where the IDF used joint warfighting actions as its main method of conducting operations, as well as the observation of actions that could prevent the Momentum Plan from achieving the desired results.

Keywords: joint operations; anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD); combined arms; multi-domain battle (MDB); cross-domain maneuver (CDM); Momentum Plan.

Introduction

Since the dawn of time, military organizations have tended to create specialised formations, based around different types of weapon systems, and develop their doctrine around the combined action of these formations.

Although it can be argued that the actions of the military in the First World War constitute the first examples of combined arms operations, due to the fact that

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the air arms of most belligerents evolved during the interwar period, World War II can be considered the first war in which all categories of armed forces, air, land and sea, operated under equal terms, due to the technological advance achieved in the interwar period. The existence amongst the ranks of the first Israeli servicemen of individuals that have previously served in the armies of various nations during WWII (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999) has been a major influence in the IDF's acceptance and development of its own joint warfighting doctrine since 1948 (Israel Defence Forces 2017).

From the very beginning, the State of Israel was surrounded by hostile states, because of the cultural, religious and social differences between the Jewish and Arab populations (Kaplan 2012). At the same time, from a geographic stand point, it can be observed that the territory of Israel has reduced dimensions, thus making defence in depth actions on the ground infeasible and requiring for the IDF to use all its resources in order to deter possible adversaries (Allison 2016) or reach a quick, favourable outcome to any conflict.

1. Evolution of the Israeli Military Doctrine

The first clear demonstration of the usage of multiple domain missions is the Suez Canal War of 1956. The adequate supply of tanks, AFVs and artillery meant that IDF had to undergo a significant change in terms of methods of carrying out combat actions by Israeli Armed Forces (Brower 2018). Armoured formations, founded during the previous war, were brought to adequate level of manning and equipment, which led to their placement in the first echelon of frontline troops. Due to the manoeuver to fires ratio that was thus in their favour, the Israeli Ground Forces became a military structure that placed greater emphasis on offensive operations. Even more so, the IDF began to create and deploy specialised infantry formations, ranging from airborne to mechanised units, designed to function, either as the avant-garde or as units attached to the armoured forces, supported by specialised, and in some cases mobile, artillery units, establishing in this way the usage of combined arms formations in the land domain. The Paratrooper Brigade conducted its first combat drops during this conflict, proving that the IDF had the capability to conduct airborne operations in an efficient manner (Ginsburg 2015). Remarkable to the organisation of the Israeli airborne formations of the time was the inclusion of armoured and artillery sub-units in their order of battle, thus giving the whole formation the ability to execute combined arms manoeuver (Gawrych 1990).

In the aerospace domain, due to the purchases of new aircraft, planes were able to complete missions in the proximity of ground forces, thus ensuring air defence and close support of allied troops.

Lessons learned in the 1967 Six-Day War, mainly that of close tactical and operational coordination between the ground and air forces, were highlighted in the early stages of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The 1967 war had multiple results in the local political balance. Thus, Israel's decision to go to war through a surprise attack led to the refusal of France, Israel's main arms supplier at the time, to continue to provide the military equipment and related maintenance services required to the Israeli armed forces. Israel's exit from the sphere of influence of France (Bass 2010) led to the formal introduction of this state into the sphere of influence of the United States, due to its acceptance to take over the duties of Israel's main supplier of military equipment (Bowen 2017). Thus, the 1973 war became the first official war, through third states/proxies, between the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, in the Middle East. As is well known today, the first attempts of the IDF to push back the Syrian and Egyptian forces on both fronts were dominated by armoured advances, aided by Close Air Support missions, fact that the Arab forces pre-empted, due to its similarity to the IDF actions during the 1967 War (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.). The two most important factors that helped the Israeli forces to rally were the excessive deployment of Egyptian forces, besides their AAA coverage, as well as the fact that a number of Syrian AAA (anti-aircraft artillery) units have not completed the relocation of their equipment in time to provide coverage for their ground assets, facts that were used by the IDF to their advantage, through the usual air-land attacks. From this point of view, this conflict illustrated that air units cannot win wars on their own, requiring constant coordination between these troops and ground forces in order to stack their effects and enable commanders to manoeuver. The naval forces played a strategic role during the 1973 War, due to the fact that their deployment helped ensure the continued supply of IDF with ammunition and equipment. The Naval Forces, like the IAF (Israeli Air Force), have helped maintain Israel's ability to strategically hit targets, either inside the Arab territories (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.) that were previously considered safe by Arab leaders.

The end of the 1973 War brought no major changes in doctrine. The fact that Israel has managed to defeat the two most important opposing countries twice in less than ten years, eventually reaching a peace agreement with one of them, has strengthened Israel's prestige and managed to prevent any major attacks on its territory.

Although the 1978 attempt of IDF to launch a military operation in Lebanon faltered because of the lack of American support (Middle East Monitor 2019), the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon which has unclear motives, perhaps being more accurately described as the first Israeli War motivated mostly by internal politics (Oren 2017). More importantly, because of the uncertainty that was present among the majority of the political leadership of the time, the commanders could not be briefed accurately

with a conclusive set of objectives and timetables in which to achieve them (Oren 2017). At the same time, extra pressure was put on the commanders due to the fact that reserve units had to mobilise for the invasion of a country, a measure that proved to be unpopular, reducing the morale and the combat effectiveness of the troops (Rubin 1982), involving Israel into what its leadership envisioned as a limited war (Anton and Iordache 2007).

Although Operation "Mole Cricket 19" became the best-known operation during this conflict, rightly so given the fact that the IAF used drones for the first time in order to supress Syrian air defence batteries in the Bekaa Valley, other operations such as the amphibious landing carried out by IDF north of Sidon can provide even now a valuable blueprint for combined arms actions at the operational level due to the fact that the amphibious landings of ground assets was supported with a diversionary one, mainly consisting of interdiction missions carried out by missile boats of the Israeli Navy and IAF aerial assets (McLaurin 1989).

Furthermore, as a new element to the IDF doctrine, the IAF has deployed attack helicopters both in close air support missions for ground forces or in hunter-killer roles against mechanised or motorised assets of the Syrian and Lebanese forces (Israel Defense 2014).

More importantly, the 1982 War brought to IDF's attention the fact that it needed to adapt its' operating procedures to the urban terrain. The IDF excelled in the rural areas of the region, due to the fact that the majority of the population and resources were placed in those areas. Even the reclaiming of Jerusalem did not prove to be a challenging experience for the IDF as a whole. The Lebanese Conflict proved to be exactly that. The IDF came face to face with an enemy force who, besides its unwavering devotion to their religion, had the support of the local population, had knowledge of the operational battle-space, as well as the fact that it could be used as a deniable proxy force by its adversaries. Israel has also faced an important adversary, Israeli public opinion, due to the fact that the IDF presence in Lebanon was seen as an occupation and, more importantly, it was interpreted as a waste of lives and resources to achieve unclear goals.

The hit and run attacks and ambushes of Hezbollah and its proxies became a common fact, the emergence of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) as an important tool in the insurgent's arsenal, as well as the introduction of missile attacks has shown the form of the actions that insurgents would take in the next series of conflicts, actions that IDF had to adapt in order to degrade or prevent them.

Since the conflict, IDF have had to adapt to the fight against unconventional opponents, whilst maintaining conventional war-fighting capabilities.

In the air field, the IAF adapted and used aerial means that could have considerable time on station, UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), helicopters and SIGINT (Signals intelligence) aircraft gaining more attention due to the fact that operations, now known as targeted killings, had the following requirements:

‒ attacks on enemy structures or combatants was meant to be precise, in order to prevent collateral damage;

‒ the attacks were to be carried out at stand-off distance, that did not endanger the crew or the aircraft (Israel Defence 2014);

‒ The continuous fusion of data from sensors was to be achieved due to the requirement of maintaining awareness of the targets and of the surrounding battle-space (Sadot n.d.).

The IDF started developing tactics in order to prevent the usage of low tech methods by the insurgents, such as improvised artillery attacks or UAVs, either through adapting the tools for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) used during targeted killing operations, or by deploying and adapting air defence and aerial assets to intercept the aforementioned kind of attacks.

In the maritime field, the Israeli Navy started increasing its manpower, due to the fact that it needed to enact interdiction operations against smuggling attempts by Hamas, PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) or Hezbollah affiliated groups.

The ground domain is the one in which the IDF could be said to have developed largely due to the 1982 War and subsequent Intifadas. The need for the Land Forces to operate in heavily populated urban areas, where the majority of the inhabitants are hostile towards Israeli units, led to these structures to develop procedures, equipment and tactics specific to riot control after high profile incidents (Shipler, 1982). At the same time, the urban experience gained by the Land Forces during this conflict led to the widespread adaptation of one of Merkava Main Battle Tank's principles, that of being able to take infantryman into combat, to IDF's substantial tank reserves, creating heavy Armoured Fighting Vehicles (Markowitz 2018).

At the same time, due to the fact that, in addition to the early stages of the 1982 War, up to 2006, the IDF were mainly involved in low-intensity conflicts, naturally led to an over-emphasis on counter-insurgency tactics and operations, whilst the combined arms doctrine was placed on a secondary level of importance.

The 2006 War could be considered the last great moment the IDF learnt valuable lessons in the combined arms operations. The emergence of Hezbollah as a prototype of what would later be known as a hybrid force created multiple difficulties for the Israeli armed services.

For the first time since the 1982 war, the IDF faced a challenge, both for its frontline troops and, even more importantly, in the depth of its own perimeter, an asymmetric formation, Hezbollah, proving that it had the means and the will to stop Israeli strikes and to disrupt the Israeli mobility operations.

The IDF's answer was to start a endowment program aimed at counteracting the threats posed by Hezbollah's actions. In the field of land forces, Active Protection Systems, adapted to Soviet systems, were put into production and distributed

massively to armoured, mechanised and even motorised formations (Markowitz 2018). Heavy AFVs, previously introduced during the 1982 War, were modernized due to the need to operate in an urban environment, where ambushes by heavily armed infantry formations were common occurrences. At the same time, the Land Forces started introducing elements of "network-based warfare", such as the Tsayad system, meant to offer commanders a more accurate assessment of the battlefield and to increase the level of coordination between troops (Defense Industry Daily 2007).

One of the most important lessons by the IDF is the one regarding missile defence. Although a number of systems, such as David's Sling, Iron Dome or the Arrow series, were developed during the 2006 Lebanon War, the frequency and complexity of Hezbollah's missile attacks had given the impulse needed for these systems to be tested and implemented faster (Rapaport 2010).

Also, Land Forces recognised the importance of applying the lessons learned in the conventional conflict to the fight against unconventional forces, one of these being the control of the territory, mainly rural, through the establishment of checkpoints meant to control the flow of personnel and equipment (Matthews 2008), a practice taken over by the Israeli Border Police.

2. The Momentum Plan-Adaptation to Change

The mass development of anti-access/area-denial technologies by a number of countries, such as Russia and China, has determined the Western military community, the Israeli included, to take actions in order to either prevent the establishment of such systems and, in the case of deployment by a potential adversary force, to degrade, deny or destroy the respective system in order to allow friendly forces the ability to manoeuvre in the depth of the adversary's battle-space. The use of A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) systems is not new, given that during the Cold War, all sides developed and deployed surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missile systems, a fact taken into account during the period's military planning.

The present tendency to plan for the neutralization of this systems can be viewed through the prism of the "great power competition" that takes place nowadays, as well as the military's need to find a potential adversary in order to stay relevant for funding.

The US Armed Forces, with the US Land Forces at the forefront, have taken steps to update the end of Cold War strategy of the AirLand Battle, adapt the new (to a certain extent) cyber and space elements, by creating the MDB/CDM (Multi Domain Battle/Cross-Domain Manoeuver) (South 2019). These armed forces consider that the first operating procedure would apply with tactical and operational means, whilst allowing operational and strategic level commanders to employ Cross Domain Manoeuver, using the effects of multiple types of formations in order to

achieve the desired effect of manoeuvring in the opposing force's strategic depth (South 2019). Thus, it can be argued that this type of actions are an update to the combined arms tactics used in the previous century.

Israel is firmly placed in the style of Western military thinking, making adoption of the MDB/CDM for the IDF almost a fact. Considering that the main countries actively deploying the A2/AD types of systems, Russia and China, are traditional suppliers of ammunition for potential Israel opponents, such as Syria, Hezbollah and Iran, offer the rationale behind the IDF's call for a new type of overarching set of principles and tactics (Bethel, 2016).

The IDF's variant of the MDB/CDM has been called the Momentum Plan, due to the fact that it calls for "strong manoeuver capabilities" (Frantzman, 2020) and "temporary breaches" (Ortal 2020), using "through the concentration of strike capabilities and through advanced ISTAR capabilities (Ortal 2020). What differentiates the Momentum Plan from MDB/CDM is that IDF plan takes into account the need for destroying enemy assets firing at friendly civilian objectives, promoting thus a whole-of-government approach regarding warfare (Ortal 2020).

One of the main characteristics of the Momentum Plan is the establishment of "expose and destroy companies", small formations meant to attract enemy fire in order to provide friendly ISTAR objectives the opportunity to locate, fix and destroy the opposing force formation (Shaham 2021).

A unit created around the principles of the Momentum Plan was established in 2019, under the name Unit 888. The latest publicly available information with regards to this unit was presented in 2020, stating that the unit will consist of servicemen from the infantry, engineers, armour and aviation weapons, with the planned integration of transfer of servicemen coming from the intelligence and communications branches of service, for the start of the first training activities of the unit (i24NEWS 2020).

Conclusions

The IDF has, from its very beginning, been a force that used to the fullest the concepts of combined arms formations, in order to enable breakthrough of the opposing side's frontlines and rapid manoeuver for the achievement of envelopment and eventual surrender.

The evolution of the environments in which the units of the IDF have thought enable this organisation to assimilate a number of new technologies and tactics, remaining, even after this most recent conflict, at the forefront of military innovation and achieving its aim of protecting the Israeli nation.

Although the Momentum Plan aims to provide a rapid victory, integration with joint forces such as the United States, and synergy between the various categories of forces, shows planners that they have to consider a number of facts.

Firstly, the fact that electronic countermeasures in place by the opposing force could degrade or deny the IDF of its' informational superiority and, more importantly, the use of networked, precision-focused systems, countermeasures such as those used in the conflict in Ukraine.

Secondly, the concept of "expose and destroy companies" could prove to be flawed. Recent examples that should be kept in mind are the usage of remotely-operated weapons by ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) in the Middle East, the deployment of similar systems by Hamas or Hezbollah meaning that IDF subunits would expose themselves to a volley of accurate and constant level of fire, in order to achieve the destruction of what amounts to a little more than a robot in a building. Although jamming could be an answer used by the IDF, pattern recognition software readily available on the Internet could negate this countermeasure.

Thirdly, the Momentum Plan focuses on the delivery of blows by all three categories of IDF forces, thus giving the Land Forces ample freedom of deployment in regions such as Gaza or Lebanon. However, whilst the MDB/CDM take into consideration the appearance of a peer competitor, the Momentum Plan excludes this, focusing on unconventional opponents with access to highly sophisticated weaponry, thus not taking into account the appearance of an equal competitor for Israel, such as Turkey, which could maximize the usage of aerial and naval means to degrade or destroy Israeli troops. The recent tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea between Turkey and the other NATO members, such as Greece and Turkey, may provide examples of growing Turkish influence in the region, which could interfere with the economic and political activities of the state of Israel, leading to the need to adapt the IDF in order to combat possible aggressive actions by conventional state actors.

Lastly, the usage of joint warfare actions by the IDF has enabled this organization to achieve considerable advantages over its adversaries in both urban and rural areas. At the same time, the 1982 and 2006 wars in Lebanon have proven to be conflicts where the IDF faced initial, doctrinal difficulties and were able to identify and remedy them, proving a considerable level of adaptability that could be applied if the Momentum Plan needs to be further developed.

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